

WATER SECTOR PARTNERSHIP A ROADMAP FOR CONTINUOUS GROWTH

The main challenge currently facing the water sector, without a doubt, is to bridge the water gap between the global water requirements and the existing, accessible, reliable, and sustainable supply.

In a business-as-usual basis, by 2030 the global water requirements would grow to 6.9 trillion cubic meters whilst the water supply will account for just 4.2 trillion cubic meters.

Consequently, the second challenge would be to bridge the financial gap to build the infrastructures and to improve the operational efficiency of existing infrastructure.

The third challenge is to pave the way for collaboration between the public and private sector by contributing skills, technologies and investments to achieve the common goals and obtain an appropriate distribution of risks between both sectors. These collaborations present clear advantages as:

- ★ They allow joining forces to solve the existing problems, which are so numerous, widespread and urgent that thinking about solving them alone seems, at least, unrealistic.

The collaboration of Aqualia with IESE Business School is a part of the company's strategy and commitment to sustainability

- ★ They allow the public sector to transfer some of the project risks to the private sector and focus on other tasks where they can add much more.

- ★ They provide with an efficient and continuous transfer of technology and know-how in fields like digitalization, smart management, operational processes, etc.

- ★ And finally, they mean a much needed private funding mobilization. There are significant amounts of impact finan-

cial resources out there waiting to be invested in sustainable projects and water and sanitation are among their top preferences. We are in one of those times where the financial investors are aligned with the political agenda and we should not lose this opportunity.

In this line, two case studies of these collaborations between the public and private sector, the New Cairo WWTP (Egypt) and El Realito Aqueduct (Mexico), carried out by Aqualia and IESE



PARTNERSHIPS: CONTRIBUTING TO THE SDGs

Business School, have proven their excellence and exemplarity being selected by UNECE (The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) among the 20 best public-private partnership initiatives worldwide since 2016. Both initiatives were recognised as "Building-Back Better" projects for their contributions to post-pandemic reconstruction by an international panel of this multilateral organisation at its "5th UNECE International Public-Private

Partnerships Forum 2021", held in Geneva from 22–26 April.

The United Nations views this work as crucial for the future of society, as an estimated 5 billion people are expected to be concentrated in urban areas by 2030, accounting for 60% of the world's population.

First listen. Then talk

The collaboration of Aqualia with IESE Business School is just a part of the

company's strategy and commitment to sustainability in water sector.

Just a few weeks ago, Aqualia published its 2020 Sustainability Report, placing the focus squarely on the conversation with citizens and stakeholders with a view to forging ahead in the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda, one of the company's primary commitments. Dubbed "Conversa", this year's report completes the listening process that began in 2019, when an in-depth analysis of strategic materiality and active listening was conducted with more than 18,000 people. The company points to dialogue and collaboration with all social agents as the two pillars on which to respond to the new post-pandemic challenges and to continue contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which have been part of Aqualia's strategy for years.

"The year 2020 proved to be a very complicated one, as we had to deal with health emergencies without neglecting the climate emergency, a matter of great concern for citizens and institutions", explains Aqualia CEO Félix Parra in an interview at the beginning of the report. In this interview, the CEO praises the efforts of the workforce, who have been hailed as essential workers during the pandemic. "They have always demonstrated a strong commitment to public service, and today we can say that, thanks to that same spirit of commitment, we have been able to respond to one of the greatest challenges humanity has ever faced", notes the CEO.

In fact, even in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, the company has in-

New Cairo WWTP, aerial view





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creased its workforce by 10.7%, which now totals over 10,500 employees in 17 countries. The company serves 29.6 million people –16% more than last year. These figures place Aqualia as fourth in Europe and ninth worldwide in terms of population served, according to the latest ranking (2021) of the international publication Global Water Intelligence (GWI).

The company underlines the effort made to guarantee the well-being of all people, not just its own workers, during the health emergency. The report also mentions that a major deployment has been made in customer service. In Spain, this effort has been positively valued by 83% of citizens. Demand for remote support grew at an unprecedented rate in 2020. A solid 97% of users gave a positive rating to the technical and human resources available through the Aqualia contact multichannel platform.

Adjusting to the new reality posed by the coronavirus in no way dampened Aqualia's commitment to sustainability, one of the pillars of the company's corporate strategy. Quite the contrary, Aqualia stepped up efforts to mitigate climate emergencies and water stress. In recent months, for example, the company joined a renewable energy purchase programme and a project to install photovoltaic panels that will reduce emissions by 16,200 tonnes of CO₂ per year; managed a 10.9% increase in wastewater reuse compared to the previous year; and even bolstered Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) as a cornerstone for improving its environmental indicators.

"In 2020, we revised our digitisation programme and reprioritised it. For instance, we significantly boosted the development and deployment of our Water Analytics (WA) tool to manage water more intelligently in cities and thus reduce the water footprint, and we also implemented systems to optimise meter reading times", explained Félix



Parra, who stressed the importance of technology as an opportunity to improve service to citizens. In this regard, the company invested nearly two million euros in 2020 on developing technological tools and carried out 21 innovation projects, to which it allocated over five million euros, 19% more than in 2019. These research projects focus on water circularity, waste-to-resource, renewable energies, biofuels and biofactories and other projects related to carbon neutrality.

A tangible contribution to the SDGs

Throughout a pivotal year that has clearly underscored the interdependence between people and the planet, Aqualia has also reinforced its commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals, earning the recognition from several institutions for its engagements. In fact, the company was the first full water-cycle operator to secure sustain-

ability certification based on its contribution to the SDGs, and has even garnered recognition from the United Nations and the PPPs for Cities Centre, endorsing its economic and social impact as a government partner in implementing water management projects. By adhering to the Global Compact as full members, joining the StepbyWater alliance and belonging to more than fifty associations, the company has sought to underline its commitment to alliances as a catalyst for meeting the goals and objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

In conclusion, the company also highlighted the approval of its 2021-2023 Strategic Sustainability Plan, one of the major milestones achieved in recent months after extensive efforts. With this plan, Aqualia harmonises long-term plans with tangible objectives so that it can measure the impact of its actions. "Its implementation allows us to define projects, actions and perfor-

mance indicators and thus measure our contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Today, the traceability afforded by this plan is more necessary than ever not only to quantify our progress and remain accountable to the Board of Directors, but also to respond to the demands of society and have the capacity for continuous improvement", concludes Parra.

You can download both the full report and the other communication materials from Aqualia's 2020 Sustainability Report web page.

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